

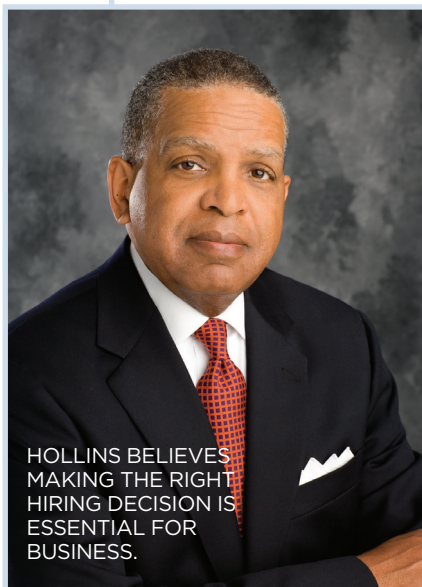
Diversitywatch

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[CORPORATE INITIATIVES]

EXECUTIVE PARTNERS

A company's diversity efforts are only as good as its search firm



HOLLINS BELIEVES MAKING THE RIGHT HIRING DECISION IS ESSENTIAL FOR BUSINESS.

THE CHALLENGE OF identifying diverse talent in corporate America is often focused on the company doing the hiring. But to fill a managerial or senior level position, companies—particularly those without a strong succession plan around diversity—often rely on one of hundreds of top-tier executive search firms such as Korn/Ferry, Russell Reynolds, and Heidrick & Struggles.

Unfortunately, many search firms struggle with diversity within their own ranks. They

work on behalf of their client—the corporation—not the individual, and they are sometimes subject to the same biases as the organizations they work for. Most common is the resistance many executive search firms have to reaching beyond the pool of proven, reliable candidates.

“THE EXECUTIVE SEARCH INDUSTRY IS A BASTION OF OLD, WHITE MEN WHO ARE NOT INCENTIVIZED TO TAP INTO A DIVERSE TALENT POOL,” says Ken Roldan, CEO of the minority search firm Wesley, Brown & Bartle in New York. When opportunities arise, says Roldan, many recruiters will often revisit the same corporate stars. “These stars, however, are rarely inclusive of women or people of color.”

Lawrence Hollins, founder and president of the Hollins Group, acknowledges that most firms are working with limited options. “It is more challenging to locate and recruit diverse talent because that pool is finite,” he explains. “It’s not nearly as large as the major-

ity market pool, and majority firms oftentimes don’t know how to effectively reach out to diverse talent.” As a result, Hollins insists that outreach must be targeted and strategic.

Companies can’t simply attend the National Black MBA Association or the National Society of Hispanic MBA conferences and expect to satisfy their diversity goals, Roldan adds. “This is not rocket science. It’s about developing and sustaining relationships with organizations that have access to the hidden talent pool. So, if a company wants an African American impact player for its business, it needs to create deep relationships with organizations such as the Executive Leadership Council,” Roldan says. “If they’re looking for a Latino impact player, they need to start developing relationships with the New America Alliance.”

A handful of boutique executive search firms specialize in minority placements, including the Hollins Group, Strategic Hire, and The Marquin Group. Unlike their majority counterparts, these firms maintain relationships with minority organizations and can access the hidden talent pool of women and people of color.

There’s another challenge in introducing new talent: Unless diversity is the focus of the search firm or a client requirement, executive recruiters aren’t obligated to include minorities in their searches. The Association of Executive Search Consultants, a global organization, has established the Diversity Resource Center to help AESC member firms promote diverse candidates and equal opportunity in employment, but it does not function as a regulatory body for the industry.

“Within the search industry there is no one putting a gun to our heads saying we need to put forward a qualified balanced slate,” offers Roldan. “So what typically happens is the search firms rely on their old-boy network of white males because they’re often passionless about diversity and don’t have or don’t want access to our diverse ecosystem.”

—Wendy Harris